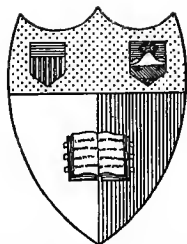


arw
9506



Cornell University Library

Ithaca, New York

FROM THE

BENNO LOEWY LIBRARY

COLLECTED BY

BENNO LOEWY

1854-1919

BEQUEATHED TO CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Cornell University Library
arW9506

Memoir of John Murray.



3 1924 031 444 486
olin,anx



Cornell University Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.



Engraved by Hall (by Permission) from a Photograph by Mayall.

THE RT. HON. WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE, M.P.

MEMOIR OF JOHN MURRAY.

THE Memoirs of Mr. Murray, very recently published, have already had so favourable a reception from the public, that their place among the successful publications of the year must before this time have been fully assured. But they deserve much more than a momentary good fortune. For they form not only the biographical record of a very able man, and of a most interesting personality ; but a chapter of great importance in the history of literature, especially but not exclusively on its industrial side.

Books are, after all, a product of manufacturing industry ; but, among manufactures, theirs is surely the most interesting, and the most peculiar, because it is based upon the reduction of a mental product to a material form, and what was originally intangible and ethereal, in this way, without losing its earlier character, comes to be embraced within the same category as a yard of calico or a bushel of wheat.

But while these have no value except what is exhibited by their outward form, so that the independent producers of other bushels of wheat or yards of calico meet them in "the market" upon equal terms, the producer of the book exhibits to the world a double entity, one material, the other mental ; and the author pleads that, as the material thing which we call a book is protected by the law against abstraction, so the thoughts contained in it, and wrought by him into a structure more or less elaborate, should in like manner be protected from reproduction. For reproduction, from his point of view, is theft. It is offering to the world, for such price as the world be willing to give, not only the paper and print which the producer has to buy and pay for, but the composition contained in them, which represents the time and labour, and therefore the food, and raiment, and lodging, and all the lawful expenditure of the author.

On this basis has been erected that curious formation which

we call the law of copyright. The conditions of its birth and history have been chequered and abnormal ; but the reasonableness of the proposition that mental toil, on taking literary form, should not be deprived of the remuneration enjoyed by bodily labour, has brought it out into the light of day, and so secured its acceptance. And it appears in this century of ours to take an increasing hold on the intelligence of societies and the assent of states. It has a train of satellites, such as the protection of pictures from copying in the sphere of sight, and of music in the sphere of sound, and again in the prohibition to convert the contents of private letters into public property without the consent of the writer.

But the author, when he has obtained an acknowledgment of his right to protection, has not yet surmounted all his difficulties. The grower of wheat, and the manufacturer of calico, produce articles complete in themselves, and only requiring certain manipulations before reaching the ultimate consumer. These processes are performed by a multitude of persons ; and the function of the intermediate distributors, being simple, is performed by large numbers of persons. But the author has given birth to a commodity which is perfectly unavailable for the purpose of yielding him support, until he has contracted, as it were, a marriage with a capitalist who will agree to become joint partner of the book, giving it a body where the author has supplied the soul, and thus at length constituting it a marketable and productive commodity. The author cannot himself as a rule be the publisher, and publishers are extremely few ; so few that, until a very recent date, they might be counted on the fingers. Practically, and as a general rule, the author in relation to his customer is nobody, until his initial performance has been capped by the accession of the publisher. Better would be the position of a man who should offer for sale the stock and lock of a rifle without the barrel to complete it.

The publisher, then, stands in an immovable position between the author and the public ; and it largely depends upon his choice whether he shall starve or feed both the one and the other. His office faces both ways. As to that side of it which regards the author, I know of no reason to doubt that it has now reached, in the main, its mature and final development. In these volumes of Mr. Smiles we find set before us for the first time a full and systematic account of the manner in which this office, as towards the author, was understood and discharged by a great London

publisher. Great, not in the limited beginnings of the business inherited from his father, but in the qualities by which he enlarged and converted it into a wide and complicated scale of transactions, which were marked throughout by a treatment of authors so full of enterprise, of liberality, and of considerateness, as to entitle him not only to the acknowledgments of individuals, but to the grateful recollections of the class. The fortune he acquired was not, I believe, in full proportion to the magnitude and apparent success of his undertakings. Undoubtedly the perusal of these volumes tends to create an impression that it would have been larger, had he been somewhat more stinted in the terms which he offered or allowed to authors. His large, genial, sympathetic spirit sometimes permitted feeling for the individual with whom he dealt, if not to colour his expectation of a market, yet certainly to enter into the price he was to allow for the commodity. It is even probable that by his individual action he either permanently raised, or at least accelerated the rise, of the standard of literary remuneration.

The process, by which the great profession of letters has advanced to its present position, has been a slow one. It can in my belief only become wholly satisfactory when the law of copyright shall have been placed upon such a footing as to allow the public, its true patron, earlier and more effective access to the perusal of new and high-class works, than for the most part it at present enjoys. But the progress actually effected has been immense. Let us go back to the time when, in this country, Milton accepted from a bookseller £5, with contingent payments of £10 more, for the privilege of issuing 'Paradise Lost.' We are accustomed tacitly to commiserate the poet, and to hold his publisher in small account for liberality. But there is a word to be said on the publisher's behalf. Fifteen pounds, even if we multiply it say by three, with reference to the altered relation of value between cash and commodities, may be but a small sum. Still it is a sum, and passes into the pocket, and the question arises whether there had ever before been given among us, by any publisher, for any work, any payment at all? Such cases may have existed, but I have never been able to discover them. Take another instance. Fifty years ago, America, as a very young country, probably represented a much earlier stage of development in the literary question than England, or than the America of to-day with its huge and rapid development. At any rate, we have before us in the revised 'Life of Mr. Dana,' but just published, a curious account of his transactions with one



GLADSTONE IN HIS EIGHTIETH YEAR

which directly or indirectly has been the cause of the

of the first publishers of New York respecting his peculiarly interesting work, 'Two Years before the Mast.'* As he was not a rich man, considerable pains were taken to get the best possible price for it. But this proved to be only 250 dollars, or £50. It was reprinted in England by Mr. Moxon without the protection of copyright, and a larger sum was voluntarily remitted to the author than he had obtained in America by parting with his property in the work. Compare with these cases the state of things in which 'Woodstock,' only in part composed, had already in 1826 been set down by the House of Constable as an asset at £7500, and another novel, not yet begun, but to be written during the year, at £7500 more.† Of the immense advance thus effected on behalf of literary livelihood, the reader of these volumes may be led to surmise that an appreciable share is due to Mr. Murray.

Let me illustrate this general statement from the Biography, by instances which shall not be associated with names so famous as those of Scott and Byron. In 1820, for the 'Memoirs of Lord Waldegrave,' together with Horace Walpole's 'Last Nine Years of George II.,' he agreed to pay £2500, a price which no other publisher would give, and which he did not recover from the public. He gave Washington Irving 3000 guineas for the 'Voyages of Columbus;' 2000 for the 'Conquest of Granada,' losing on the two works £2250. He gave 1000 guineas for the first volume of Napier's 'Peninsular War;' £1200 for 'Franklin's Second Expedition;' £3000 for the copyright of 'Crabbe's Poems;' 500 guineas for Milman's 'Fall of Jerusalem;' for the 'Martyr of Antioch' and 'Belshazzar' the same sum in each case. He gave Miss F. Kemble 400 guineas for 'Francis the First.'‡ In most of these cases (but not the last), he went against or beyond the judgment of his own literary advisers; no inconsiderable persons, for they were such as Gifford, Croker, Lockhart, and Sharon Turner.

He showed an enlightened judgment in preferring a system of sharing profits to that of purchasing outright. But the largeness of these prices was not the only form in which he exhibited his pecuniary disinterestedness. To Scott, by whose genius he had profited, he presented his fourth share of the copyright of 'Marmion' "as an act of grateful acknowledgment;§" and when

* 'R. H. Dana; a Biography,' vol. i. pp. 25-7.

† 'A Constable and his Literary Correspondents,' chap. vi. p. 405.

‡ 'Memoirs,' vol. ii. pp. 89, 104, 106, 257, 258, 260, 283, 290, 385.

§ Vol. ii. p. 275.

in the promptitude of his offers, in his disposition to constant multiplication of engagements, and in the large share of work properly literary which he habitually took upon himself. He did not follow the practice common among publishers of employing a salaried reader, but obtained *pro re natâ* the friendly aid of eminent men, who valued their relations with him, and gladly lent it. His private judgment could not but be considerably exercised in the choice of this or that adviser as occasion arose, and it has been seen that he withheld from them any servile deference even to the increase of his own costs and charges. From their letters it is evident that they respected his judgment, and those letters of his, with which the volumes are thickly, but not too thickly strown, bear witness to his literary capacity.

And this is perhaps the proper place to notice his concern in the foundation of the 'Quarterly Review.'

Along with that Review, Mr. Murray seems to have rather hardened in his Toryism with the lapse of years ; but it was, in its inception, a literary undertaking. It followed the 'Edinburgh,' founded in 1802, which has the honour of originality, and with which Murray came to be connected, as part agent, and then as sole agent in London, about three years later. "It appeared at the right time, and, as the first quarterly organ of the higher criticism, evidently hit the mark at which it aimed." *

Differences with the 'Edinburgh' publisher soon arose, we are told, out of his practice of drawing accommodation bills, that is to say bills not represented by values. Accordingly, before 1808 had expired, the agency was withdrawn from Mr. Murray. He was then left free to prosecute a plan for the establishment of a Review in the southern capital, anticipated in this matter by the northern.

This plan seems to have been eminently and conclusively his own. The inception of the 'Quarterly' was a matter far more arduous and complicated than had been that of the 'Edinburgh.' In the case of the elder sister, a body of distinguished men appear to have framed their own literary scheme, and then to have found a publisher ready to undertake its mercantile counterpart, each party having its own province, and its own responsibility. There was not, in the case of the 'Quarterly,' any such compact combination of writers formed beforehand under an editorial head. The Editor was appointed, the writers one by one attracted,

* 'Memoirs,' vol. i. p. 91.

the literary arrangements constantly considered, by Mr. Murray, who is evidently and exclusively entitled to the honours of a founder. Next to him comes Sir Walter Scott; and in the third place stands Gifford, whose office in docking, trimming, adapting, and almost rewriting articles appears to have been one of great labour and anxiety, peremptorily and strongly, but ably and conscientiously performed. Although the 'Review' had the aid of Scott from the first, although Southey, Croker, and other able men came in, although it enjoyed in a few cases the brilliant superintendence of Canning, yet the want of a regular staff, and of undivided responsibilities, resulted during the early years of the 'Review,' from 1809 to 1817, or near it, in an unfavourable balance-sheet. But neither difficulty nor loss exhausted the courage, persistence, and assiduity of the publisher. It was rewarded, after a costly and toilsome apprenticeship, by a career of marked and enduring success. Under the powerful direction of Gifford, and after a short interval of Lockhart, it equalled or surpassed the large circulation of some 12,000 copies, to which the northern rival had more rapidly attained. It became in the hands of its publisher, an estate; and no estate was ever more honourably acquired by integrity, discernment, and munificent appreciation of literary service. Even where each number was a loss, every article supplied by the pen of Southey was paid for at the rate of a hundred pounds.

Mr. Murray had indeed something like a passion for periodical literature. He repeatedly entertained the idea of widening the market for this class of supplies by the establishment of a magazine of smaller price and more frequent appearance than those of the 'Quarterly.' This propensity reached its climax at the juncture he undertook to face single-handed, in addition to all his other engagements, the immense labour and responsibility of a daily newspaper. There is no more curious or attractive chapter in the biography before us, than that which recounts the origin, foundation, and catastrophe of the 'Representative,' that having been the title of the ill-omened and disastrous journal. It can, I think, hardly be denied that in this matter Mr. Murray conspicuously lost the balance of his judgment. It can hardly be considered prudent for a great publisher to found, own, and manage a daily newspaper. For in the deed or memorandum of partnership* we read, "the paper to be published by, and to be under the management of, Mr. Murray."

* 'Memoirs,' vol. ii. p. 186.

He had already been partner with Mr. Croker in the *Guardian* newspaper published at Windsor, and it had failed. He was led into the adoption of this larger scheme, says Mr. Smiles, 'through the influence of Mr. Benjamin Disraeli.* Does the history of commerce, or of letters, offer to us a more curious picture than that of the sagacious veteran of the book trade drawn into a wild and impossible undertaking by the eloquence of a youth of twenty? He had been at his work for thirty years; and this was the year 1825, the year of 'Prosperity Robinson,' the year of dupes and dreams. It was also the time when Mr. Canning "called the New World into existence, to redress the balance of the old." If Mr. Canning, when he made the boast, was perhaps a little influenced by the intoxication of the time, we may be the less surprised that its fumes found their way into the well-chambered brain of Mr. Murray. Then it is to be borne in mind that Disraeli the elder was a close personal friend, and was one of the advisers employed about the 'Quarterly.' Intimacy had long been established between the families. But, after every allowance, our amazement can be but little abated when we contemplate the fascination exercised by the young magician. Nor was the publisher the only captive. Mr. Benjamin Disraeli, who had already communicated with a financing house in the City, and obtained the adhesion of a certain Powles (afterwards shown in Carlyle's phrase to be a windbag) twice undertook a journey to Scotland. He was confident in the solidity of the arguments he had to use. Lockhart he writes,† "must see that, through Bowles, all America and the commercial interest is at our beck," and that he is to be "the Director-General of an immense organ, and at the head of a band of high-bred gentlemen, and of important interests." Mr. Isaac comments‡ on the letters of his son. "His views are vast, but they are founded on good sense." "Never did the finest season of blossoms promise a richer gathering." He reported§ that, though Lockhart eventually declined any personal share in the undertaking, yet both he and Sir Walter Scott viewed it with approval. Seeking to win a correspondent in Germany, he represented|| that—the paper would surely become "the focus of the information of the whole world." The phrase carries internal evidence of its originality. But it is borrowed, in a letter to another foreign gentleman, by the great

publisher himself. "I wish to make this journal the focus of the information of the whole world." A costly plagiarism! Mr. Murray by the agreement was to supply half the capital, Mr. Powles and Mr. Benjamin Disraeli were to furnish one quarter each. At last the *Representative* came to the birth. After a hard fight for existence it succumbed. The financial history will be best read in the narrative of Mr. Smiles.* Suffice it to say that the Chapter containing it is one of those in which fact beats fiction; and that Mr. Murray lost £26,000 by the ill-starred adventure.

An impartial reader will, I think, conclude from the perusal, that Mr. Murray's miscarriage was by no means due to mere pecuniary greed: that spirit of enterprise, true though rushed into exaggeration, had more to do with it; and that strong personal sympathy, perhaps even affection, was a main factor in the undertaking. He comes out of it smaller, perhaps, as a calculator, but more, than ever a man. And it is in truth the strong and genuinely human element, marking and following the whole course of his career, which heightened its interest, but from time to time endangered its success; and which has impressed much of the stamp of chivalry on a trading career.

Many of the side-lights of this Biography open subjects of great interest; for instance, the origin and character of Gifford. But there is one of them which cannot be passed by, by reason of its probable bearing on Mr. Murray's commercial education. Constable, whose large and enterprising business came to a disastrous end in 1826, and made place for that great epic presented to us in the heroic close of the life of Scott, was, if not the tutor, yet certainly the foreshadower of Murray. He had something of the same boldness of conception, and largeness of liberality towards authors: with the disadvantage of a less central position, and a narrower market at his doors. Their relations were close for a considerable time, and their sentiments of reciprocal regard were warm. The tie was weakened by Murray's distrust of his friend's finance, which he thought dangerously mixed up with reliance on accommodation bills. In 1807 the junior entered on a course of remonstrance with the senior trader. But the bond between them was not then broken, and Mr. Murray most warmly acknowledges the value of pecuniary support received from him in 1810,† when his own resources may have been seriously strained by the heavy charges attending the first

* Vol. ii. chap. xxvi.

† 'Archibald Constable,' vol. i. p. 384.

establishment of the 'Quarterly Review.' This is related in the memoir of Constable by his son, a work which is unduly swollen with much padding, but contains no small amount of valuable information, and forms a portion of what may be called the Scott-literature. Controversy arose upon Lockhart's treatment of Constable in his great Biography. However, in a letter of the year 1827, Lockhart says* all literary men know the debt they owe him personally for having thrown so much of new life and vigour into the conduct of the profession. And he seems to be entitled to some share of the praise which has been earned by Murray on a larger scale, and with a surer sagacity, and a closer adherence to sound principles of business.

In the grand enterprise of cheapening literature, and making it accessible to the public at large, Mr. Murray, Mr. Charles Knight, and Mr. Constable, had their respective shares.† The 'Family Library' and 'The Library of Entertaining Knowledge' began in 1829. But Constable had been beforehand with them, and had brought out his 'Miscellany' in the beginning of 1827.‡ Mr. Murray had long been pondering his own scheme, which he at length brought into beneficial operation. And it seems no improbable conjecture that this delay was owing to the pre-occupation, first of his mind, by the fascinations of the *Representative*, and then of his resources by a disastrous liquidation.

I must not close these remarks without referring to the literary Court of Mr. Murray§. His hospitality was large and constant. It was not confined to authors of standing and repute, for I myself, without the smallest pretension to such a character, shared it half a century ago. His drawing-room, open from day to day, had the attractions of a most refined literary club, *minus* the subscription. His relations with the distinguished circle did not merely represent what Carlyle calls "the cash-*nexus* between man and man." The company which so freely went in and out had no limit of nationality and was of no sect in politics or letters. In another development of his munificent spirit, he coveted and contrived the formation of a gallery of portraits. The hand of Lawrence was to be traced there; and when he had not long passed the middle of his career, it already included Byron, Scott, Coleridge, Southey, Moore, Gifford, Croker, Barrow, Hallam,

* 'Archibald Constable,' vol. iii. p. 439.

† 'Memoirs,' vol. ii. 295-6.

‡ 'Archibald Constable,' chap. vii. p. 440.

§ Vol. ii. p. 83.

Irving, Campbell, Lockhart, Crabbe, among men of letters, besides the chief voyagers to the North Pole and Africa.*

The scope of human life is indeeds wide, and its aspects multitudinous. On some and the very highest of them I have not presumed to touch. But Murray raised the tone of his profession, and every man who does that is among the benefactors of his race. I have therefore sought to mark the work, as a literary life which is entitled to the rare and solid distinction of a permanent place in the history of letters. My own title, so to mark it, is to be found only in the fact that, though two distinguished ladies † still survive, one of whom preceded me, I am the only man now living who has had Mr. Murray, second of his race, for his publisher. *His sattem accumulatem donis.*

W. E. GLADSTONE.

* Vol. ii. p. 317.

† Mrs. Butler and Lady Eastlake.

